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THE THAMES AT SUNBURY

H. HUGHES-STANTON

BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

THE ROYAL ACADEMY

A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT EXHIBITION

BY T. MARTIN WOOD

IN the space at my disposal it will be impossible to review the vast exhibition of the Royal Academy unless I confine myself almost strictly to the consideration of tendencies. This is the only way to prevent the article from degenerating into a list of names. So I shall only use names where I cannot dispense with them as instances, making use of as few as possible and drawing them only from the few artists whose work really adds to the luster of the Academy—the few whose work, though compromised, is not, like that of lesser men, annulled by the limitations which are apparent. Merit in art needs protec-

tion as well as praise, and this protection can only be afforded by isolating, through mention, tendencies that imperil it.

I shall only just touch upon the sculpture. The Royal Academy as an institution is typically English. It compromises all around. It has for a long time seemed unfriendly to only one thing in the world—academic art. This year in this it modified its attitude, accepting the *Thyrsis* of Mr. Harvard Thomas, and thus making amends to the sculptor—the one living exponent of truly academic sculpture—for the rejection of his *Lycidas* some years ago. Nothing could be further away in spirit from the works by

which it is surrounded than the *Thyrsis*. Works around it seem to be written all over with the names of the London districts from which they were sent in, speaking of the smugness, the tameness, the sameness of the inspiration in those places, and of how unnatural is the art of sculpture to suburban genius.

In regard to pictures: the ordinary Royal Academy picture at present is disappointing. Painting at the Royal Academy has not even yet freed itself from the Newlyn influence which was bad. And the refinement of technique, which has since been learned from Mr. Sargent, has not always carried with it that painter's austere regard for truth. Most of the landscapes in the present exhibition represent the success and failure of modern realistic painting. They are painted in the method least adapted to the expression of actuality—in Mr. Sargent's method, but with a difference. With the realists faith in the pictorial quality of nature does not last out to the end as it does with Mr. Sargent. They undo with their last touches the structure of values on which they sought to rest an illusion of reality. This undoing of what they intended is unconscious, paint itself being so bright and pretty that in their hands it refuses to represent reality; yet, Mr. Sargent uses the same colors, but in his use the fact that he has had them from an artist's-color-man disappears from our mind. He at least does not paint nature as if it had been colored by a firm of artist's-color-men. This is what Royal Academy realism does. It retains as much unreality in its pretension to reality as any of the old conventions it has replaced. If it were not for what Mr. Sargent does in his two or three landscapes in this exhibition we should be inclined to believe that paint could never be made the medium for *actual* representation—that we must always fall so far short of that, by the character and limitations of artist's material, that it were better, with the Post-Impressionists, to abandon it as an ideal for art.

The painters of whom we have been speaking seem to gild the lily—nature,

because they cannot manage the representation of the lily plain with their bright paints. But there are other painters, and here we are passing to a commoner level, with whom the lily-gilding is a business. We refer to the painters of execrable products called "exhibition pictures." The corruption of public taste is due to these pictures, painted with a view to self-advertisement and without reverence for nature. If the artist looks upon picture-making, as the old landscape masters did, as the opportunity for the creation of a world in art to be put by the side of the real world, but not as an imitation, he holds a special license. But if he gives his work out as a literal transcription of nature we claim from him as the very first guarantee of good faith refinement in the presentation of truth. It is imposture to treat us to lying sensationalism in the name of work from nature, and it speaks better for the health of public taste than we could have expected that pictures of the kind are returned unsold to the artists at the close of every Academy exhibition by the thousand, to block up, most justly, the floors of their studios.

Two of the most interesting pictures in this year's Royal Academy are "The Window," by George Clausen, R. A., and "The Morning Toilet," by Charles Shannon, A. R. A. In Mr. Clausen's picture we are supposed to look from a room, in which two figures are standing, across a large cluster of tulips in the open window to a garden and house just showing beyond. Thin muslin curtains are spread over the open window almost seeming to stir in the breeze, and through these transparent curtains real day-light seems to enter. In the flowers, in the scene without and in the effect of light within the room, a reverence is expressed before everyday phenomena of beauty that is inspiring to witness. Such an art as this seems to prolong one of those bright moments of life which we would most wish to be prolonged.

Mr. Charles Shannon has always managed to bring into pictures of decorative intention much of the luminosity that is usually only associated with naturalistic



PORTRAIT GROUP

WILLIAM ORPEN

BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

impressionism. And Mr. Shannon is a true romanticist, having the art of reviving what seems like a memory, but what upon examination proves to be something that never existed. This artist sometimes seems to rank near Rossetti. One lives in hope that he will add to the great

paintings of the world. But all great things have a little austerity, and the painting I have just described has none of that. If only the artist could have refrained from coming so perilously near to vulgarity with over-sweetened color. But the art of Mr. Shannon is always



THE PICNIC

BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

GEORGE HENRY

far removed from "millinery," the mere astute adjustment of pretty color touches, which threatens even the art of so remarkable a painter as Mr. William Orpen. Few living artists possess skill or vision so simple and direct as Mr. Orpen's, but in this simplicity, his great

possession, he seems to have no confidence. Mr. Orpen is one of the few living artists who can finish a picture. It is one of the proofs of a great artist to be able to finish without loss of spontaneity. Another artist who can finish is Mr. Charles Sims, his touch becom-



IN FROM THE NORTH SEA

ROBERT W. ALLAN

BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

ing more exquisite and apprehensive as it dwells upon the subject. It is a great pleasure to search for the finished passages in his works, and a grief to find them in each new picture getting fewer. They have to be discovered from masses of hastily generalized form put on canvas with the slap-dash of scene-painting, doing for us the little that scene-painting does, in telling us what we ought to imagine, instead of making it impossible for us to imagine anything else. There is all the difference in the world between such sketchiness as we are describing and the indefiniteness that takes the imagination captive in a picture by Monticelli or Conder.

An appearance of swiftness in execution is, of course, one of the most characteristic features of modern painting. It is notably exhibited in the art of Mr. John Lavery who is the best exponent of Whistlerian economy in arriving at an effect.

Although the swiftness, the lightness, of modern method should tend towards an appearance of light-heartedness in painting, the fact remains that what one

is most impressed with in the Royal Academy is the deadly seriousness of everything. Art with gaiety in it has a French tradition. English painters search Watteau for this inspiration, but bring away only costumes. In Mr. George Henry, however, with his picture "The Picnic" we have an instance of an artist who has probably never bothered about the French precedent, but who has succeeded in the expression of the pleasure of life—of all things the most difficult to express, perhaps because models only show it when they are not posing. In spite of the promptings from their titles pictures in this vein, as a rule, impress us only as marvelous illustrations of the effect of boredom upon the human figure. The note of pleasure has to do with the spirit of things, and that is found where the photographic method of painting cannot be employed.

Ancient and modern landscape are sometimes spoken of as if respectively they meant imaginative and realistic art. But we have gained our modern marvelous intimacy with nature only through imagination. Some artists are interested



THE WINDOW

GEORGE CLAUSEN

BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

in the mood rather than the form of nature; others are especially bent upon composition, seeking a combination of naturalism with the highly pictorial qualities of the past; while, again, others strive to rest the whole theory of landscape upon intimacy with natural phenomena. These main intentions provide for all the landscape painting in the

Academy, and, in the order above given, are notably represented by Mr. H. Hughes-Stanton, Sir Alfred East and Mr. R. W. Allan. There is, of course, plenty of landscape work in the Academy not whole-heartedly conventional, yet carrying out the representation of nature by rule rather than by inspiration. I am choosing no representative of this

class, which does not give us any very admirable addition to the art of picture-making, on the one hand, or any moving translation of nature, on the other.

The vital characteristic of modern landscape, that which distinguishes it from ancient, is the pantheistic note: the expression in it of a modern faith, hardly resolved into words but possessed in

feeling. It reveals also in treatment of the human figure in landscape a very different point of view to that shown in ancient art. Nature there provides only a platform and a background, while in modern art it is the sea that interprets the fisherman and the earth the peasant. It is the soul of the earth that looks from the peasant's eyes.

AMERICAN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

OLD TYPES AND MODERN INSTANCES

BY MONTGOMERY SCHUYLER

I. THE LOG-CABIN

OUR architects are showing, in the domestic architecture which is so easily the best architecture we have to show, a praiseworthy predilection for native and, so to speak, indigenous types. Strictly speaking, of course, we have no autochthonous architecture, saving and excepting the wigwam, or tepee, which the discoverers found. But the kinds of habitation which the early settlers provided for themselves as soon as they were able to provide any permanent shelters whatsoever, have a prepossession in their favor for modern domestic purposes. The very fact that they were built at a minimum of time and trouble, at a minimum of expense, is a proof that they were the readiest and most straightforward means to the end of shelter. In other words, they conformed to the environment, and conformity to the environment is a prime virtue in domestic architecture. It cannot be said to be the primary quality of American architecture at present. The fact that we have so little of an architectural patrimony has been taken in the past as a reason for surveying mankind from China to Peru, and importing all manner of forms, which happened to hit the fancy of the importers, without much care whether the buildings to which they

belonged suited the climate or the social habits of the region to which they were transplanted. The tendency, plainly manifested only during these last years on the part of our architects of dwellings, to hark back to our own primitive building, is on a different and more respectable footing from the previous "excursions and alarms" in the past fashions of exotic architecture. Here, at least, in our "primitives," is exemplified a manner of building which in the past has been found most natural to us.

The log-cabin is without question the chief of our primitives, the most extended and the longest lived. It really prevailed over virtually the whole extent of North America which was opened to the settlement of Northern Europe, which is to say that the scenes of French and English and Dutch and Swedish settlement and colonization were all heavily wooded. Only in the treeless wastes of the American Southwest, in which the pioneers were from the European Southwest, was the construction of the adobe, or sun-baked clay, originally evolved on the treeless wastes of Asia, feasible and tempting. In the greater part of the Northern States the first necessity of the settler to his subsistence was a "clearing." Until the forest was felled it pre-